*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports of States parties** (*continued*)

*Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman* (continued)
(CRC/C/OMN/3-4; CRC/C/OMN/Q/3-4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Oman took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Nelson**, referring to the information furnished at the Committee's 2059th meeting, asked when the study on child labour would be completed and how the Government intended to implement any recommendations stemming from it. He pointed out that, while the recently adopted Children's Act contained many very useful provisions, it failed to address some areas, such as the situation of migrant children and the protection of children who worked in family businesses. He also asked whether the public awareness-raising efforts on HIV/AIDS and drug abuse were being carried out in schools and with young people.

3. **Mr. Cardona Llorens**, stressing that there was a difference between the law and practice, requested further information about specific steps taken to guarantee the rights of children with disabilities. He asked how children with disabilities were integrated into mainstream schools, whether teachers received relevant training and whether accommodations and support were provided. Noting that all the special schools were located in the capital, he wished to know what educational services were available to children from elsewhere in the country. He enquired about measures taken to make sports, leisure and other activities truly accessible to children with disabilities. Given the incidence of intra-family marriages and their known connection with the prevalence of disabilities, he asked what steps were being taken to prevent such marriages from taking place.

4. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman), replying to questions raised at the Committee's 2059th meeting, said that relatives could report cases of child abuse, via a hotline, or in writing; anyone who reported such cases had the right to anonymity. The Family Protection Department also had the authority to report cases brought to its attention. When its staff received a complaint, they met with the child and visited any relevant settings such as the home, school or institution. All findings were centrally recorded. The procedure was the same throughout the country. Children were removed from their families only in extreme situations where their safety was at stake, and only by court order.

5. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Social Development was working in tandem with all the relevant ministries to set up a team of trainers qualified in child protection matters; training was also provided to all professionals who worked with children. A programme was under way to raise awareness of children's rights, a child protection manual was being planned and guidelines were being issued, including one on the treatment of child victims of violence.

6. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that nutrition was one of the most important areas on which the Ministry of Health focused and was included in its five-year plans. Campaigns had been rolled out on the benefits of breastfeeding, leading to a net decrease in the malnutrition rate. A law that had been enacted on breastmilk substitutes contained penalties against companies that infringed its provisions. Psychological health services were available throughout the country. The school health programme had a mental health component and provided for doctors to visit schools. The Al Massarah Hospital in Muscat, which had been established in 2013, had a special child psychology unit. The current focus was the dissemination among health-

care professionals of a manual devoted to children's mental health, as well as the training of primary health-care providers, including school nurses.

7. **Ms. Al Habsi** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Education recruited psychologists and social workers to identify problem cases in schools. Guidance had been developed in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on how to diagnose and report mental health problems in children. Information remained confidential initially; parents were involved in the process at a later stage. The Ministry had adopted a regulation on student affairs which covered disciplinary matters. When a student broke school rules, a committee composed of the school principal, a lawyer and a local government representative was responsible for deciding on the action to be taken, which could range from a warning to a reprimand or temporary suspension. Parents must be involved in all disciplinary procedures. Corporal punishment was absolutely banned.

8. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that the Personal Status Act covered situations where filiation must be proven via DNA testing; however, such tests could be administered only with a court order. Under the Criminal Code, pregnant women were not subject to the death penalty: it was only once the baby was born that the measure could be applied. When both parents faced a prison sentence, one of the two was exempt if they had a child under 15 years of age. Pregnant inmates received suitable care and could be hospitalized if necessary. Children born to imprisoned mothers were given age-appropriate care and nutrition and, when they reached the age of two, they either stayed with their mother in prison or were placed with their father or relatives, under the supervision of the relevant authorities. Although children over nine were considered capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, the Government was looking into the possibility of raising the age of criminal responsibility.

9. Anyone who exploited a child for begging purposes, including the child's parents, bore criminal responsibility. The Ministry of Social Affairs provided counselling in such situations. Child beggars could be placed in residential centres or foster families. The Children's Act prohibited all forms of child exploitation. Human trafficking was an offence under the law, and children subjected to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation were considered victims and received all the necessary care. Pursuant to the Constitution, no one could be returned to their country of origin if they were accompanied by children. Residence could be granted on humanitarian grounds; for example, in the case of injured children, the family could remain until the child recovered.

10. **Mr. Kotrane** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether the State party might reconsider its policy of permitting children over 16 to volunteer for the military. He pointed out that unlawful adoption and forced labour should be offences under the law.

11. **Ms. Winter** asked why violence against children carried such light penalties and why human rights and fundamental freedoms were not included in school curricula.

12. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** requested additional information on the psychological support units in schools: how many there were, whether all schools had one, how their impact was assessed and how many psychologists and child psychologists they comprised. She asked whether a gender perspective had been incorporated into efforts to prevent violence against children.

13. **Ms. Khazova** (Country Rapporteur) asked how widely available mental health centres were, whether children with behavioural problems were given medical treatment and whether children were taught proper online behaviour and warned about the dangers of the Internet. She requested clarification as to whether or not imprisoned mothers were permitted to have contact with their children.

14. **Ms. Oviedo Fierro** asked about the State party's implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and requested additional information on the length of maternity leave. She wished to know what measures the Government was taking to address the problem of children with stunted growth.

15. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman), replying to the question about children in the military, said that Oman was not involved in any wars or conflicts, and no armed groups operated on its soil. No one could be recruited into the armed forces, the police or other security forces before the age of 18. Volunteers could receive training and physical fitness instruction as from the age of 16, but could not perform active service.

16. Three specialist schools had been established in Oman for children with disabilities: one for those with impaired hearing, one for those with intellectual disabilities and one for the blind. In addition, a total of 25 Al-Wafa Centres for Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities had been set up in the governorates. They provided services not only for children's rehabilitation but also for their full integration into the workforce and society. In addition, a number of associations for children with disabilities, including one for children with Down syndrome, were active in Oman, some of which provided specialized medical assistance to children. The Oman Paralympic Committee had been set up in order to permit children suffering from motor disabilities to compete in the Paralympic Games, thereby also fostering their social inclusion.

17. Children who were deprived of a family environment were placed in the Childhood Care Centre, which was attached to the Ministry of Social Development. The Centre provided family-based care modelled on SOS Children's Villages International. Children were encouraged to exchange views with the Centre's professional staff and were offered opportunities to take part in sports and theatre and to travel to other countries.

18. A study on child labour prepared by the Ministry of Social Development indicated that children who worked generally did so within their own family or in order to help in their family's business. Most were aged 15 or older and worked primarily in fishing, shopkeeping or restaurant services. There was no forced child labour in families in Oman.

19. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that children were allowed to work only in the context of the family and only if such work did not undermine their health or education. Draft legislation on work performed by children, which specified the areas and conditions in which children were allowed to work, was currently under consideration by the Ministry of Labour.

20. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that a comprehensive programme had been set up in order to protect from abuse or neglect children who had been born out of wedlock and who were subsequently placed in foster care. Special training sessions were organized for foster mothers by psychologists and social workers from the Ministry of Social Development, and regular sessions and workshops were held with foster families in order to discuss the problems and challenges they faced.

21. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that sexual and reproductive health was an integral part of public health, and a national strategy on young people's health had been designed on the basis of a 2002 census. Components of the strategy included a special programme for girls on puberty, nutrition and personal hygiene; a guide for young people on smoking and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; the development of an approach based on case histories of persons with sexually transmitted diseases; and the preparation of a young people's guide on reproductive health. Doctors and nurses in health centres and health workers in schools had been

trained to respond to young people's special needs, and efforts had been undertaken at the international level to compile best practices.

22. On the question about intra-family marriages, she said that a recent census indicated that spouses in 50 per cent of marriages were related to each other within the first or second degree of consanguinity. Despite the fact that that statistic reflected an Omani social tradition, the Government was engaged in wide-ranging efforts to raise awareness of its potentially negative impact on health. In conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health had organized an international workshop to exchange experiences and was preparing a national action plan. A major component of the plan was an initiative to introduce a mandatory blood test for all prospective spouses which had been submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval. Efforts were also under way to implement a programme under which a set of tests would be administered to screen infants for disabilities and disorders, such as hearing impairment and thyroid deficiency. A review of the situation of infant mortality in Oman revealed that malformation was a causal factor in infant deaths, and several projects and programmes had been set up with the aim of addressing the causes of congenital malformation.

23. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman) said that the blood tests that were to be part of programmes to prevent consanguineous marriage were also intended for young people in universities.

24. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that significant progress had been made in reducing malnutrition. Given that Oman had a relatively high rate of consanguineous marriages, which could give rise to blood-related disorders, the Ministry of Health had proposed routine initial screening for anaemia in children at 9 months of age and again at 18 months. Since some 54 per cent of the children already tested suffered from anaemia, a project had been implemented to ensure that they received iron supplements.

25. Children requiring advanced psychiatric treatment had to be transported to hospitals in the capital to receive it, but in addition, nationwide, some 58 specialists provided psychological assistance to children. Children with behavioural problems were monitored in accordance with special protocols, and drug treatment was provided when deemed medically necessary.

26. Stunting was caused by a variety of factors, not malnutrition alone. It could often be traced to maternal prenatal health: for example, records showed that 24.8 per cent of pregnant women in Oman had some form of iron deficiency and 1.3 per cent had hypertension, factors that could affect fetal development during pregnancy and lead to low birth weight. Approximately 8.9 per cent of the newborns in Oman were underweight.

27. **The Chair** asked for confirmation on two points: whether there was now no law prohibiting female genital mutilation, since the relevant bill had not yet been adopted; and whether Omani men often married girls from South-East Asia and then had the marriage annulled, subsequently exploiting the girls for domestic work. He requested clarification concerning reports that the Criminal Code prescribed leniency for men who committed offences in order to save the honour of a female relative who had been engaged in unlawful sexual relations.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.*

28. **Ms. Al Habsi** (Oman) said that all schools in Oman had a staff psychologist, psychiatrist and nurse. The Ministry of Education supervised and evaluated their work through on-site inspections, centralized workplans and assessments of the extent to which students benefited from it.

29. In cooperation with international partners, United Nations agencies, the relevant ministries and civil society organizations, the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances had formulated a national strategy to combat narcotics that adopted a rights-based approach and set specific indicators for raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. A unit within the Ministry of Education formulated awareness-raising programmes that were subsequently implemented in all schools. School curricula included modules on the dangers of HIV/AIDS and drug addiction in a class on life skills designed for children in grades 1 to 12 — Oman was one of the first countries in the Gulf region to introduce such a class. Other classes, such as natural science, social science and Islamic studies, also included warnings and information on HIV/AIDS and drug addiction.

30. Every school in Oman had a gym, and students had physical education class every morning in the schoolyard. The Ministry of Sports also organized sports for children, including girls, during school summer holidays.

31. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman) said that article 72 of the Children's Act prescribed a term of imprisonment ranging from 5 to 15 years and a fine of from 5,000 to 10,000 Omani rials for forced recruitment of children into armed forces or sexual exploitation of children. The Government considered female genital mutilation to be a harmful traditional practice: it was banned under article 20 of the Children's Act. A bill that would specifically prohibit the practice was expected to be adopted in the near future.

32. Marriages involving foreign workers, including foreign domestic workers, were regulated by the Labour Act and other relevant laws, violations of which were subject to criminal sanctions. No instances of honour crimes had been reported. Incest was punishable by strict penalties, including capital punishment.

33. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that the Family Protection Department worked in coordination with the prison authorities to facilitate communication between imprisoned mothers and their children.

34. Protection of the environment was a key concern of the Government. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs had been established to ensure, among other things, the protection of water resources and the supply of safe drinking water throughout the country. In accordance with the legislation on environmental protection, all oil refineries and related facilities were located far from urban areas.

35. Employers were generally not in favour of extending the length of maternity leave, for reasons that included issues of gender equality. Although employers allowed breaks for breastfeeding mothers, consideration was being given to putting forward legislative proposals regulating breastfeeding times during working hours.

36. The right to freedom of opinion for children was guaranteed under the Children's Act. Children were thus free to express their opinions within the family, and their views were taken into account when family issues were addressed. Although children born out of wedlock generally remained with their mothers, placement in a care centre might be ordered if such action was considered to be in their best interests.

37. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that it was important to bear in mind that employers in the private sector, who focused on ensuring the viability of their businesses, would weigh very carefully the financial implications of any proposals to extend the duration of maternity leave. As to environmental protection, it should be noted that, in addition to introducing legislative measures, the authorities worked closely with civil society organizations to meet international standards.

38. **Ms. Khazova** asked whether girls aged 16 who became pregnant were punishable by law and what support was provided for the poorest households.

39. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked what regulations on the naming of children born out of wedlock were in place. She wished to know how many facilities were able to carry out court-ordered DNA tests to establish filiation and whether the delegation could provide examples of cases of denial of paternity that had been decided on the basis of such tests.

40. **Mr. Kotrane** said that the Committee considered that maternity leave was not at variance with the principle of gender equality and recommended that the State party should introduce a period of maternity leave of not less than 14 weeks, in line with the International Labour Organization Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

41. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that his Government was cooperating with the World Bank on a social safety net to ensure a decent standard of living for all workers. Low-income households that were not eligible for other social benefits were entitled to assistance, in the form of a monthly cash transfer, from the social security fund, which was administered by the Ministry of Social Development. Education grants were available to ensure access to higher education for students from low-income backgrounds. More than 150,000 social housing units had been built for vulnerable families in recent years. All persons able and willing to work were assisted by the authorities in securing employment in either the public or private sector. Children born out of wedlock enjoyed the same rights as other children, including the attribution of a family name at the time that their birth was registered.

42. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that women who gave birth out of wedlock were not liable to criminal punishment. While children born to adolescent mothers usually remained within their family environment, they could be placed in an institution or with a foster family if it was deemed to be in their best interests or the mother so wished.

43. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that DNA tests to establish a child's parentage could be carried out in forensic and other laboratories. Specific examples of court cases involving such tests would be provided at a later date.

44. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that a number of programmes had been introduced to protect children from harmful content and raise awareness among children of the dangers of the Internet, including campaigns on cybersecurity.

45. **Ms. Al Yazidy** (Oman) said that all mothers under the age of 16 were able to complete their education, either at secondary school or, alternatively, through adult education programmes.

46. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said the legislation on combating cybercrime that had been adopted provided for criminal sanctions, including prison terms, for those who produced, distributed or purchased materials depicting child pornography or who incited or facilitated child prostitution.

47. The existing legislation governing children born out of wedlock, including their personal status, was based on sharia and reflected the customs and practices of society at the time it had been drafted. It was possible that consideration would be given to reviewing that legislation in order better to reflect current social reality and to ensure that it was fully compliant with the principle of the best interests of the child, including in respect of custody matters.

48. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked whether the Government intended to give legal recognition to the right of mothers to exercise testamentary guardianship over their children and whether it planned to replace the ages at which a mother's right to custody of a child ended, namely seven years for boys and the onset of puberty for girls, with a single, harmonized age limit.

49. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that, although the current age limits were generally considered appropriate, courts were able to exercise considerable discretion in such matters.

50. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Social Development would continue to collaborate with the judicial authorities on guardianship rights to ensure that, where possible, mothers — rather than other, more distant, relatives — were able financially to exercise guardianship over their children.

51. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that the authorities worked with various partners to promote and protect the right of children to freedom of opinion and expression. Children's views were canvassed through a range of activities and events and duly taken into account in programmes and strategies affecting them.

52. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that the law banning the marketing and promotion of breastmilk replacements, which had been in place since 1998, established sanctions for non-compliance.

53. **The Chair** asked whether the State party would give consideration to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, which at present stood at nine years.

54. **Mr. Kotrane** asked whether the study on the possibility of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 years, which was mentioned in the State party's written replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/OMN/Q/3-4/Add.1), had been undertaken.

55. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that the issue of raising the minimum age had been discussed with the judicial authorities and specialists in the area of criminal responsibility and that the Government would report to the Committee on the outcome of those discussions in due course.

56. **Mr. Abdulla Nasser Al Rahbi** (Oman) said that reports indicating that some foreign women who contracted marriage in Oman were subsequently exploited for domestic work were incorrect. Only those foreigners who were duly authorized by the Ministry of Manpower were able to work in the State party, and that included foreigners who had married an Omani citizen abroad.

57. **Mr. Kotrane** (Country Rapporteur) thanked the delegation for providing the Committee with a clear picture of the situation of children in Oman. The various policies and legislative measures that had been taken by the Government in the period under review, in particular the Children's Act, had further strengthened the implementation of the Convention in many areas. That notwithstanding, further work remained to be done, for example the introduction of implementing regulations for the Act. The State party should also consider acceding to the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure and ratifying other international instruments, including the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). In its concluding observations, the Committee would, among other things, draw attention to discrimination against certain categories of children and the need to give full effect to the Children's Act.

58. **Ms. Khazova** (Country Rapporteur) expressed appreciation to the delegation for the many replies given to the Committee's questions. In its recommendations, the Committee would certainly raise the issue of the minimum age of criminal responsibility. While significant progress had been made in furthering children's rights in the public sphere, more efforts were required to develop a culture of children's rights in the domestic sphere.

59. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that the dialogue had given his delegation a valuable opportunity to provide the Committee with an accurate picture of the actual situation of children's rights in Oman. His Government would pay close attention to the Committee's recommendations and continue to work to fully implement relevant legislation and provide the best possible services for the children of Oman.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*